

## Message Text

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 7839

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US XF

SUBJECT: ASAD DISCUSSES PEACE PROCESS

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 7767, (B) STATE 279090, (C) STATE 273497

### 1. SUMMARY:

ASAD AFFIRMS HE UNDERSTANDS NEED TO WAIT FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT TO STUDY ME QUESTIONS IN DEPT AND NOT SPECULATE ABOUT POLICIES OF NEW ADMINISTRATION. EXPRESSED OPTIMISM RE PEACE PROCESS IN LEBANON. HARDEST QUESTION IS TO ESTIMATE PERIOD IT WILL TAKE TO ACHIEVE REAL PEACE BUT HE BELIEVES COUNTRY-WIDE CEASE-FIRE AND COLLECTION OF HEAVY WEAPONS SHOULD BE ACHIEVABLE RELATIVELY QUICKLY. SYRIA DETERMINED

TO SQUELCH ANY FACTION BREAKING CEASE-FIRE AND FULLY SUPPORTS SARKIS PROGRAM. IRAQI FORCES IN LEBANON KNOW THEY FACE SIMPLE CHOICE BETWEEN WITHDRAWAL OR DEATH. HE DID NOT DIRECTLY ADDRESS ISSUE OF RETURN OF PALESTINIANS TO SOUTHERN LEBANON AND RESULTANT POTENTIAL FOR OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT. HOWEVER, THRUST OF HIS COMMENTS WAS THAT NOTHING WOULD BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN ANYWHERE IN LEBANON WHICH WOULD RISK BREAKING OF CEASE-FIRE. END SUMMARY.

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### 2. AFTER RETURNING FROM MY MORNING MEETING WITH

KHADDAM TO PRESENT AGREED TALKING POINTS ON LEBANON. (DAMASCUS 7821).

I

RECEIVED UNEXPECTED SUMMONS TO THE PRESIDENCY. ASAD HAS JUST COME BACK FROM HIS HOME VILLAGE NEAR LATTAKI AND PUT ME FIRST ON HIS LIST OF APPOINTMENTS. OUR MEETING IN AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 14 LASTED TWO HOURS. ASAD WAS RELAXED AND CORDIAL THROUGHOUT.

3. U.S. ELECTIONS:

AS KHADDAM HAD DONE IN OUR EARLIER MEETING, ASAD DISPLAYED A LIVELY INTEREST IN U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND, AS HE PROBED FOR HINTS OF ANY NEW DIRECTION IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, PARTICULARLY AFFECTING THE MIDDLE EAST, SHOWED HOW CLOSELY HE HAD FOLLOWED THE ACTUAL VOTING. AS I HAD SAID TO KHADDAM, I TOLD ASAD THAT THE NEW TEAM WILL NEED TIME TO STUDY IN DEPTH THE MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES FOR WHICH IT BECOMES RESPONSIBLE IN JANUARY. NO MATTER HOW MUCH MAY HAVE COME OUT ON THE PUBLIC RECORD ABOUT THESE ISSUES, DETAILED EXAMINATION OF THE NEGOTIATING HISTORY OF EACH WOULD BE REQUIRED. HE, ASAD, MUST ALLOW THE PRESIDENT-ELECT SUFFICIENT TIME FOR SUCH STUDY. STRESSED THAT AS A GOVERNMENT AND A PEOPLE WE HAD LONG BEEN PROUD OF BIPARTISANSHIP IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND REMINDED HIM OF YOUR EARLIER MESSAGE THAT YOU WOULD BE SHORTLY DISCUSSING ALL ASPECTS OF OUR FOREIGN POLICY WITH THE DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESIDENT-ELECT AND THAT YOU INTENDED TO STRESS ESSENTIALITY OF MAKING EARLY PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. ALSO RECALLED YOUR ASSURANCE YOU WOULD INSURE THE NEW ADMINISTRATION IS FULLY INFORMED OF THE EVOLUTION OF SYRIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS.

4. ASAD ASKED SEVERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW BIPARTISANSHIP WAS ACHIEVED IN THE UNITED STATES AND SEEMED FASCINATED TO HEAR ABOUT THE STEADY CONTACTS BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND CONGRESS AND HOW THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE USED MEDIUM OF THEIR PRESS CONFERENCES TO HELP FORM A PUBLIC CONSENSUS IN FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS. HE ENDED THIS SECTION OF OUR DISCUSSION WITH THE COMMENT,  
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"I APPRECIATE THAT THE PRESIDENT-ELECT WILL NEED TIME TO STUDY MIDDLE EAST QUESTIONS IN DEPTH AND DETAIL. WE ARE WILLING TO WAIT, ALTHOUGH PERSONALLY I HAVE ASSUMED THAT A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY WOULD BE FULLY INFORMED ON MAJOR WORLD ISSUES BEFORE THE ELECTION."

5. I THEN PRESENTED THE AGREED TALKING POINTS ON ARMS FOR ISRAEL AND LEBANON, NOTING I HAD EARLIER PRESENTED

POINTS RE LEBANON TO KHADDAM. ASAD LISTENED INTENTLY TO THE POINTS ON ARMS FOR ISRAEL BUT MADE NO SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT. CONCERNING LEBANON, HE DID NOT ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF THE SENSITIVITY OF SOUTH LEBANON AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT, BUT, I BELIEVE, CLEARLY ABSORBED THE IMPORT OF OUR PRESENTATION. (KHADDAM HAD SIMILARLY AVOIDED MAKING ANY DIRECT COMMENT ON THIS ISSUE.)

6. IN RESPONSE TO YOUR REQUEST FOR HIS IDEA ON WHAT LIES AHEAD IN THE AREA, ASAD BEGAN WITH GENERALITIES AND CONFINED HIMSELF LARGELY TO COMMENTS ABOUT THE LEBANESE SCENE. IT APPEARS, HE SAID, "MATTERS ARE FOLLOWING A GOOD COURSE IN LEBANON." THE ADF HAD ALREADY OCCUPIED THE BEIRUT SUBURBS. ITS COMPOSITION IS AND WILL LIKELY REMAIN BASICALLY SYRIAN, ALTHOUGH HE HAD URGED A WIDER ARAB PARTICIPATION. IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING IF THE ADF ENCOUNTERED SOME DIFFICULTIES BUT, HE ADDED, "WE EXPECT TO OVERCOME ANY PROBLEMS WHICH MAY APPEAR. SOME OF THE PARTIES ARE TRYING TO APPEAR RESPONSIVE TO THE PEACE PROCESS PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY ARE NOW CONVINCED THAT THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO STOP PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE." SYRIA'S ATTITUDE, BOTH POLITICAL AND MILITARY, WAS CLEAR. IT WILL NOT CONDONE ACTION BY ANY FACTION WHICH TRIES TO RESUME FIGHTING.

7. PRESIDENT NOTED THAT HE EXPECTED THE ADF SOON TO ENTER ALL DISTRICTS OF THE CAPITAL TO ESTABLISH SECURITY. IT WOULD THEN MOVE TO QUIET OTHER TROUBLED CENTERS OF THE COUNTRY. "THEN OTHER PHASES IN THE PEACE PROCESS MUST BE UNDERTAKEN. ALL IN ALL, MATTERS ARE NOT MOVING BADLY, BUT WE CANNOT LET OURSELVES BE OVEROPTIMISTIC." HE CONCLUDED BY AFFIRMING THAT SYRIAN COOPERATION WITH SARKIS WAS EXCELLENT;

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THE LEBANESE PRESIDENT WAS WORKING IN A LOGICAL AND REASONABLE WAY TO REESTABLISH STABILITY AND DAMASCUS WOULD SUPPORT HIM TO THE HILT.

8. I ASKED IF HIS COMMENT THAT CERTAIN PARTIES WERE ONLY APPEARING TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE PEACE PROCESS WAS DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY AT THE PALESTINAIN REJECTIONIST FRONT. ASAD REPLIED THAT THE REJECTIONISTS WERE AMONG THOSE UNCONVINCED ABOUT THE PEACE PROCESS, BUT THEY WERE DEFINITELY NOT ALONE ON THIS. SOME LEBANESE PARTIES SHOWED SIGNS OF NEGATIVE THINKING. HOWEVER, HE SAW NO SERIOUS GROUNDS TO BE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE PEACE PROSPECTS FOR LEBANON. DESPITE THE LARGE AMOUNT OF ARMS CONTROLLED BY CERTAIN FACTIONS, THOSE WHO WISHED TO GO BACK TO WAR WERE IN A WEAK

POSITION. TO RESUME FIGHTING WOULD BE AGAINST THE WILL OF THE MAJORITY. THEY MUST ALSO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THEIR PAST MILITARY FAILURES, AND THEREFORE, WHAT TO EXPECT SHOULD THEY RESUME FIGHTING. HE THEN RECALLED THAT THE REJECTIONIST FRONT HAD ONLY A FEW DAYS AGO PLEDGED ITS SUPPORT FOR EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH PEACE. THIS WAS AN ENCOURAGING SIGN.

9. ASKED HOW LONG HE THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE SARKIS TO ORGANIZE AN EFFECTIVE SECURITY FORCE, ASAD SAID THIS WAS THE HARDEST QUESTION. NEITHER HE NOR SARKIS WERE INCLINED TO SET AN ARBITRARY NUMBER OF DAYS FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES NEEDED TO RESTORE PEACE AND SECURITY THROUGHOUT LEBANON. SARKIS, HE NOTED DRILY, SEEMED COMMITTED TO A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS. SARKIS MUST FIRST SECURE A CEASE-FIRE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. ASAD DID NOT BELIEVE THIS NEED TAKE ALONG. WHEN A COUNTRY-WIDE CEASE-FIRE IS ACCOMPLISHED, ASAD BELIEVED THAT WITHIN A RELATIVELY SHORT TIME THEREAFTER IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO COLLECT THE HEAVY WEAPONS FROM ALL FACTIONS. TO DISARM THE POPULATION AND ESTABLISH "REAL PEACE" WOULD TAKE MUCH LONGER. I MENTIONED WE HAD HEARD ONE PROPOSAL WAS TO HAVE EACH FACTION DEPOSIT ITS WEAPONS IN A SEPARATE ARMS DEPOT WHICH WOULD THEN BE PUT UNDER ADF CONTROL. NOTED THAT KHADDAM HAD EARLIER THAT DAY DISMISSED THIS PLAN AS UNWORKABLE BECAUSE THE TROUBLE WITH INDIVIDUAL ARMS DEPOTS WAS THAT  
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THERE COULD BE MORE THAN ONE KEY MADE FOR EACH DOOR. ASAD SAID THE IDEA HAD INDEED BEEN DISCUSSED AND, UNLIKE KHADDAM, HE DID NOT DISMISS IT OUT OF HAND. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT VARIOUS FACTIONS HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO HIDE THEIR HEAVY WEAPONS TO AVOID CONFISCATION.

10. IRAQ:

I ASKED ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR AN EARLY WITHDRAWAL OF IRAQI TROOPS FROM LEBANON. ASAD REPLIED GRIMLY THAT THE IRAQIS HAD ALREADY BEEN GIVEN A CLEAR CHOICE BETWEEN WITHDRAWING FROM OR DYING IN LEBANON. HE HOPED THEY WOULD CHOOSE THE FORMER COURSE. HE THEN NOTED THAT BAGHDAD WITHIN THE LAST TEN DAYS HAD SENT FURTHER TROOPS TO JOIN ITS MAJOR ARMY MANUEVERS ALONG SYRIA'S EASTERN BORDER. SYRIA WAS NOT CONCERNED BY THE FACT THAT IRAQ HAD NOT YET BEGUN TO WITHDRAW THOSE TROOPS, BUT WAS NATURALLY FOLLOWING THE SITUATION CLOSELY. HE COMMENTED THAT IT APPEARED IRAQ WISHED TO MINIMIZE THE NUMBER OF REGULAR ARMY UNITS IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF BAGHDAD AND LEFT THE OBVIOUS IMPLICATION HANGING IN MID AIR.

11. ASAD WARMLY RECIPROCATED YOUR GREETINGS AND SAID HE  
WILL BE SEND A FORMAL ANSWER TO YOUR LETTER (STATE  
273497) IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.

12. COMMENT:

THRUST OF ASAD'S PRESENTATION, IT SEEMS TO ME, IS  
THAT HE WILL, WITHOUT EVER ACKNOLWEDGING HE IS SO DOING,  
WORK TO KEEP CONDITIONS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON FROM PROVOKING A  
CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL. I WAS ALSO STRUCK BY HIS  
SELF-CONFIDENT, IF TACIT, ASSUMPTION THAT SYRIAN  
FORCES WILL BE ACTIVE AND ACCEPTABLE IN LEBANON FOR  
AN INDEFINITE PERIOD.

13. SUGGEST DEPT PASS THIS MESSAGE TO BEIRUT AND CAIRO.  
MURPHY

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## Message Attributes

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